



Undergraduate Review

Volume 3

Article 22

2007

Streambed

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Recommended Citation

Manning, Ryan (2007). Streambed. *Undergraduate Review*, 3, 139-140.

Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol3/iss1/22

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Streambed

RYAN MANNING

Ryan Manning is a freshman at Bridgewater State College who has not yet chosen a major. He wrote this piece for Dr. Lee Torda's Writing 101 class, and also presented it at the Mid-year Symposium in the fall of 2006.

There's a backyard that I once knew so well. At the edge of this backyard, there is a well-traveled dirt path, which leads through a wooded area where a stream flows freely. This wooded area comes to life every year just behind a small but comfortable house in the town of Sharon, Massachusetts. In the spring, the lively woods are filled with muscular trees, which are just starting to fill in with green leaves. I can just barely make out the back of a house in the distance, when you stand at the woods' entrance. I was born in the springtime on March 27. My first view of the backyard woods would have been in the spring. The birds would have been chirping; the sky would have been filled with streaks of blue; the clouds would have floated far above my head, all puffy and white. A cool spring breeze would have been running through these woods to the edge of the backyard. The buds on flowers were probably starting to bloom as the sun shone overhead. The vegetable garden would have also been planted in the spring, as it is every spring, in hopes it will produce many kinds of vegetables in all shapes and forms, from round red tomatoes, to bell-shaped green peppers.

An apple tree is planted in the backyard; his name is Jonathan. He is named after the famous nurseryman, John Chapman who planted apple trees for a living. He was better known as Johnny Appleseed. It is believed that when a young apple tree is planted near a home, that home becomes a more permanent and loving one. The days were getting longer; the green leaves were growing bigger. The smell of spring is fresh and clean, it is the smell of new life. Spring is newborn, like I was then. Spring is full of new hopes and dreams.

Some of my first steps in life were taken on this fresh grown grass in the spring. My first visit to the rapidly flowing stream, which lies deep in these woods, would have been reached by following a dirt path, now muddy with melted snow. Everything around me, from tree branches to the ferns on a fern tree, would have amazed me as I continued my walk through the muddy trail, toward the flowing stream that I was so anxious to see.

In the summer, everything is at its peak. The sun shines its brightest and longest in late June. The backyard grass needs mowing every other week. The days are hot and sometimes very humid. When I was three, I would fill my blown-up kiddie pool up with cold water from the house hose, and place my plastic slide into the pool, and climb the few steps on the slide's ladder and plunge a

few feet down into the cold, refreshing water. The garden, which lies a few feet from my kiddie pool, produces very little because the groundhogs and deer eat everything. I believe the apple tree, Jonathan, still needs time to produce apples. It flowered, but the silk worms destroyed its hope this season. The raspberry bushes off to the side of the woods' entrance give off huge wild red raspberries. They are sweet and delicious to the taste. I eat them right away. The trees in the woods are now completely filled in with leaves and life, and stand with strength. I can no longer see the back of that house way off in the distance.

I follow the bare dirt path to the calm, flowing stream. The sound it makes is soothing to the human ear, as it flows fine and clear. I can hear the birds chirping their sweet melodies to each other, and can hear the squirrels leaping from tree branch to tree branch. I watch the chipmunks chase one another, in a playful way, up and down tree trunks. The trees try to enjoy the warm and humid days, soaking in as much heat and nutrients as they possibly can, knowing soon the weather will turn cold.

Fall in the woods is amazing. When the leaves turn brilliant bright yellow, red and orange, it is a sea of colors. The days are getting shorter now. The sun is not as bright as it used to be. The nights are starting to become cold. We may even turn the heat on tonight. The air in the fall around the backyard and in the woods is cool and crisp. The leaves start to fall. Soon the yard is littered with them. We rake them up, even though we know that they will keep falling until there is no more left to fall. We rake the crispy, dried up, lifeless leaves into piles and plunge into them.

A visit down the path to the stream reveals more leaves that have fallen but will not be raked. Leaves from many, many years have fallen here, building up the earth's ground and giving its soil new life. The stream is quiet and dull, spilling out as much water as it has left in it. It is beginning to run dry. Some days I am able to walk through the streambed where water once covered. The stream lays bare and dehydrated. I don't hear many birds or animals, but I do notice movement near the stream. It was a sick and dying groundhog, left for dead. It lay in the streambed soil, shaking and speaking unusual noises. Slowly, thinking it could be rabid, I run home to call animal control for them to come take it away. This is my first view of disease and death.

Winter is a time of cold nights, dark days, and harsh and fierce snowstorms. However, I also saw bright sunny days with two feet of white, puffy, and powdery snow, to play in with my friends. We build long tunnels through the snow to play adventurer, or have snowball fights and build the best snowman. The snowman would eventually melt, looking eerie and contorted. The days of a snowstorm would bring no school the next day.

The snow is deep and heavy, but I still visit the stream in the woods, now covered with ice. It was hard to follow the bare dirt path, which is now covered with powered snow, but I finally make it. The woods look different in the winter. They sound very quiet and seem almost lifeless. I can see more of the back of that house in the distance. The trees are bare of their leaves. I do not hear little animals, but I know they are out there. Most of the birds have gone south, but some remain here. I see signs of life in the snow of other animals. Deer droppings, raccoon paw prints. Most animals are hibernating for the winter. The winter does not last forever. Spring will be here soon, and another cycle will start.

The backyard of that small, but comfortable house in Sharon, Massachusetts still remains, although I no longer live there. I know with every season, the woods still change, even though I am not there to see it.